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Federal Communications Commission
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Comments on RM-11699

I am writing to the Commission to offer my comments in objection of RM-11699, a proposal to allow encryption on the amateur radio bands.

For more than 100 years, amateur radio has been known for its openness, transparency, and most notably, its self-policing. If RM-11699 moves forward, these qualities of the amateur radio service will be destroyed, causing long-lasting harm to the integrity of the amateur radio service.

When assisting in training exercises and other events such as marathons, fun-runs, and other charitable fundraisers, amateur radio operators are careful to stay in compliance with HIPAA. This includes using non-personally-identifiable information such as runner bib numbers, patient numbers, and triage colors. These exercises and practices translate to actual incidents when amateur radio operators are called upon.

While amateur radio operators are willing and able to step in to assist local, state, and federal emergency management and disaster relief organizations when other means of communications fail such as cellular telephones and public safety two-way radio systems, amateur radio was not intended to be the backbone of emergency communications systems even in the short-term.

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, governmental communications systems as well as commercial cellular telephone service providers have substantially hardened their systems. The Incident Command System and interoperability between local, state, federal, and even the private sector has also been a routine focus of drills in addition to the hardening of systems. The decreased vulnerability in these choke points make the system as a whole much more resilient after disasters and has decreased the public's reliance on amateur radio, although amateur radio operators continue to provide very valuable services. Hospitals and other agencies needing to pass sensitive information should use other means that are already available for that purpose.

Above all, allowing encryption on the amateur radio bands even in a limited fashion would completely inhibit the ability for amateur radio to police itself. There is no mechanism to police encryption on the amateur radio bands included in the proposal, because those fellow amateur radio operators who don't possess the encryption keys being used would not be able to determine if the transmissions are worthy of encryption, or even appropriate, legal, or harmless as required by current Part 97 rules. Listeners wouldn't be able to discern whether the originating station is even licensed or not. This essentially turns the amateur radio service into a de-facto "license by rule" radio service since this change would make the rules impossible to enforce.

Amateur radio would see rampant abuse of encryption because of this, turning the now-open and transparent spectrum into a wasteland of closed transmissions. This was certainly not the intent of amateur radio when the service was established in Part 97.

I urge the Commission in the strongest way possible to reject any proposal to allow encryption on the amateur radio bands.

Regards,

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